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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [SNAR](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: ARGENTINA ELECTIONS: NO KIRCHNER COATTAILS IN
SALTA, BUT PATRONAGE MAY BE POTENT

REF: A. BUENOS AIRES 500
[B](#). BUENOS AIRES 515
[C](#). BUENOS AIRES 494
[D](#). BUENOS AIRES 429

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Argentina's northern province of Salta, a picturesque, agriculturally productive regional center bordering Bolivia, offers another demonstration of Argentina's confusion of competing Peronists and temporary alliances in the run-up to national mid-terms on June 28. With only three of seven deputy seats at stake, the province is not crucial to the national outcome; nonetheless, one of the two "pro-Kirchner" seats being contested is likely to slip to the opposition. End Summary.

[2](#). (U) Ambassador visited Salta April 28 to advance a number of Embassy priorities, including counter-drug cooperation, youth outreach, and improved mutual understanding (reftel A). The visit coincided with the early and evident manifestations of a national political campaign. Although the campaign season officially began the week of the Ambassador's visit, "media campaigns" cannot legally start until May 27. On the margins of the Ambassador's visit and meetings with provincial officials, including Governor Urtubey, Poloff met with national Senator Juan Perez Alsina (Salta Renewal Party) and national Deputy Zulema Beatriz Daher (dissident Peronist aligned with national deputy Felipe Sola) as well as local academics.

[3](#). (U) Local politicians and analysts concurred that the Radical Party has been largely non-existent in Salta and that "Peronism," in one form or another, has a claim on most voters. As in the country at large, Peronists and their allies are split, but the groupings appear to be personalistic and somewhat ad hoc. One local academic lamented the lack of institutionally stable parties that would present a clear choice for voters between Peronism and an alternative.

[4](#). (SBU) Following the 2008 conflict between the central government and the agricultural sector over President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's (CFK) bill to raise agricultural export taxes, CFK appears to hold only limited appeal in Salta, with some polls showing her provincial approval rating at 29 percent and her negative assessment at 56 percent, numbers that track with national trends (ref C).

[5](#). (SBU) Senator Perez Alsina described to Poloff his party's decision to break with the national government following the farm crisis as owing to disappointment with CFK's policies, particularly over the proposed agricultural taxes but also due to her failure to fulfill campaign promises to improve governing "institutions." Perez Alsina noted that the Renewal Party remained allied with Governor Urtubey at the provincial level but would run competing candidates for

national office.

Shifting Alliances

¶6. (SBU) Among the shifting parties and alliances, the major line-up is as follows:

-- Pro-Kirchner Peronists (PJ): Governor Uturbey, who ran successfully for his post in 2007 against the official Peronist party candidate (but also as a supporter of the Kirchners), was a high-profile Kirchner protege. He is now in the process of gaining control of the formal party structure and is backing candidates for the national Congress under that banner (the Partido Justicialista, or PJ). A close ally, Fernando Yarade, formerly a provincial minister of finance, will lead the list.

-- The Dissident Peronists (Federal Front): Following the departure from the pro-Kirchner Frente para la Victoria (FpV) by national Senators Juan Carlos Romero and Sonia Escudero, the dissident Peronists pose a threat to capture at least one of the three contested seats in Congress. Current Deputy Daher is in this camp, aligned with national Deputy Felipe Sola, a Peronist dissident candidate in Buenos Aires province (reftel D). Their lead candidate is former deputy governor Walter Wayer.

-- The Salta Renewal Party (PRS): An independent party based in the province, it is represented by the current vice governor and by national Senator Perez Alsina. In a party Congress the last week of April it replaced sitting national deputy Maria Ines Diez with former deputy Jorge Folloni as

its lead candidate. This party may have lost some support, but Senator Perez Alsina thought that its party structure throughout the province, including positions in many municipalities, would be enough for it to retain this seat. It also likely has some access to provincial patronage as it remains in alliance with the Governor.

-- Civic and Social Accord: This new alliance representing the Civic Coalition (CC), Radical Party (UCR), and Socialists has drawn in some support from the Renewal party and could challenge it for a seat. Its candidate is ex-Renewal member and former Senator Ricardo Gomez Diez. (Note: Senator Perez Alsina spoke highly of him, and Embassy has worked well with him in the past).

-- Another seven parties and fronts have also established candidacies and more may be announced by the May 9 deadline for parties to register their candidates. As yet, none of the lists include candidacies for the two sitting pro-Kirchner deputies, Osvaldo Salum and Susana Canela.

Local Issues

¶7. (C) In his meeting with the Ambassador, Governor Uturbey emphasized the use Salta has made of national revenue-sharing funds and anticipated revenues from soy export taxes, saying he had distributed the resources to municipalities to promote small, grassroots projects (reftel A). Deputy Daher was critical of this process, saying that the small and scattered infrastructure works did not represent a coherent plan to improve the Province's economy and that there was a great deal of corruption involved by those around the Governor. Perez Alsina, not surprisingly, was more positive on the Governor's record.

National Expectations

¶8. (C) Both Daher and Perez Alsina predicted that the ruling party would lose its working majority in the Chamber of Deputies. Both also said that they hoped CFK would complete her term in office. Daher, however, thought it was unlikely she would. Neither CFK nor her husband, she said, appeared

capable of dialogue with persons not in agreement with them, a view shared by many of our contacts. She contrasted the Kirchner period with that of President Duhalde (2002-2003), during which time Members of Congress of many parties were consulted frequently. Under the Kirchners, she said, neither opposition nor pro-government deputies appeared to matter much to the executive. Despite serving in Congress as a Peronist throughout the period, she noted, she had never been invited to the Presidential Residence under former President Nestor Kirchner, and only infrequently under CFK (and only for official acts, rather than dialogue).

¶9. (C) Should CFK resign, Daher thought that Vice President Cobos would assume power but that he would have to call elections depending on the time remaining in CFK's term. Daher and Perez Alsina also predicted that, whether or not CFK left the presidency, Argentina would move into a more positive phase of "parliamentary" democracy in the coming two years in which Congress would have a much more pronounced role.

Comment:

¶10. (C) An adroit young politician, Governor Uturbey has advantages to dispense in the election through his provincial budget and his ties to the national government. These should be sufficient to elect at least one pro-government deputy, but two would appear to be a stretch given the deep local connections of the other major fronts and parties.

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